Faith



"God sent His singers upon earth with songs of sadness and of mirth, That they might touch the hearts of men and bring them back to heaven again."—Longfellow.

Easter Splendid Festival in the Early Centuries

Easter Sunday! What a picture the words suggest! A beautiful, sunny day, church-going and the display of the new spring suit on the boulevard in the afternoon. A day much like any other Sunday, for in these prosaic times Easter is not the brilliant, joyous festival it once was.

Suppose we were to turn back the pages of history to the Middle ages. What a festival Easter was in those days! The old pagan Anglo-Saxon festival of Easter was not merely a remembrance and its strange mummery not forgotten. Everything was light-hearted and colorful and vibrant. Even those who had to wear the long faces during the rest of the year forgot their seriousness to play and dance and perform strange tricks upon one another in the streets.

The priests, along with the laymen, imbibed the spirit of Easter and laughed and played with the care-free spirit of schoolboys. Instead of preaching serious sermons or exhorting the people to consider the wickedness of their ways, they told humorous stories of how the devil tried to keep the Spirit of Christ from ascending out of hell into Heaven. Their stories were very droll and made the people laugh exceedingly. Imagine a minister these days getting up before his congregation and telling funny stories Easter morning!

The people were very happy and greeted one another cheerfully upon the streets. "Christ is risen," they would say. "Yea, Christ is truly risen," would come the answer. Then the mummery and the leaping and capering and trick playing upon the streets! The modern French festival of the Lenten season, with its joyous abandon, more accurately resembles the Easter festivals of the Middle ages.

The Pascal Candle.

The great sight of the day was the Pascal candle burned in the principal church or cathedral in the city. How the people rushed and thronged through the streets to see it! Oftentimes the candles were huge affairs, rising as high as 75 feet in the air and weighing as much as 75 pounds. What was left of the candle at Whitsunday was made into candles for the poor.

The interiors of the churches were truly marvelous. Thousands of candles burned in every niche, flooding the place with a marvelous brilliance. Dazzling colors were everywhere. "Christ is risen. Let us be joyous," was the thought that was in the minds of everyone. Then, after the impressive chanting of the Easter hymns, would come the giving of the Easter kiss. Even the beggar and the outcast was not forgotten in this.

Easter at the beginning was a pagan celebration for the coming of spring. When the Christians came they took over most of the old observances, changing the significance to correspond with the new religion. So the old Paschal lamb of the Hebrews became the lamb of Christ. The casting of an effigy of winter into a fire that represented spring was changed into a symbolism of Judas and the fires of hell.

The lighting of the Easter fires on the sacred mountains was said to correspond to the pillar of fire that led the Hebrews out of the wilderness into the Promised Land.

Played Ball in Streets.

Many of the customs or observances, one time, had had religious meaning, but by the Middle ages this symbolism had been partly forgotten. They merely represented the spirit and joviality of the day. So there was the custom of playing ball in the streets. The ball represented the sun, which was popularly supposed to give three hops when rising Easter morning. This sport was engaged in by everyone, even by the priests, bishops, monks and mayors and corporations of cities.

Another popular custom that grew out of the egg symbol for Easter was egg chipping and egg rolling. Both of these games were to test the thickness of the shells. We still have a survival of this custom in the egg-rolling contest held annually for children on the White House grounds.

The word Easter itself means April and is the name of the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring. At first it was celebrated with all the licentious mummery imaginable to a heathen religion, but as the centuries passed and the Christians came, it became a purely religious festival. The meaning of the rites were lost, but the people observed them just the same. Surely none of us feel that we are performing a heathen rite when we give Easter eggs to our friends.

In the early days of the Christian religion no festivals were observed, not even Easter. "The whole of time is a festival unto Christians because of the excellency of the good things which have been given," explained St. Chrysostom.

Gradually, however, Easter became the biggest festival in the calendar of the church. Everyone who professed the religion of Christ was supposed to take communion on that day. If he refused his name was to be excommunicated and at death his body to be denied Christian burial.

How Date Was Fixed.

The dispute over the true time to hold Easter was one of the quarrels that shook the early Christian world. Those who had been Jewish wanted to celebrate it on the 14th of the old Jewish month of Nisank—the beginning of the Jewish festival of the passover. Those who had been Gentiles said that Easter should be observed on the following Sunday.

For years this dispute waxed warmly, until it was finally settled by the great church council held at Nicea in 325. It was decreed that Easter should come on a Sunday and that the date should be the first Sunday following the full moon after the vernal equinox (March 21). The city of Alexandria, then famed for its skill in astronomical affairs, was given the duty of fixing the date.

It was a pagan custom to regard the egg and the rabbit as symbols of procreativeness. This is about the only Easter observance that has survived to modern times. Our custom of filling our homes with lilies and early flowers seems to be a custom of recent origin.

Dozens of Easter observances, no less picturesque, have been forgotten or overwhelmed in the seriousness of these latter days. So on Easter Monday husbands struck their wives, but on Tuesday the wives struck back. In Germany the men and maid servants observed the same custom, but used switches in doing so. It was, also, the custom for parents and children to try and surprise each other in bed early Easter morning. The tardy one would receive a rough switching to remind him or her of remissness.

Much Liberty Permitted.

In every way Easter day was a day of special privilege. In Russia everyone who wished was allowed to go into the churches and ring the bells as long as he desired. Thousands of people availed themselves of this opportunity. In England the men ran joyfully about the streets lifting the women from the ground three times. The one so favored had to give the male either a silver sixpence or a good hearty kiss. This custom was observed in some parts of the country almost down to the present day. In Puy in France, from time immemorial, the canons tried to catch one of their number sleeping Easter morning. After matins were sung in the chapel they rushed in a body to the room of the sleeping one and sprinkled him with water. If the canon was found asleep he was obliged to furnish his fellows with breakfast.

Easter Day Varied.

In ancient times Easter day fell on different dates in different climates, so cycles of years with dates fixed had to be drawn up. There was a dispute over the correctness of the cycles, and there was great confusion. Finally, however, Easter date was based on the Gergorian correction of the calendar, but that threw the Eastern church out of line. Consequently Easter has only once been celebrated universally by all Christians. This was in 1865, when all the reckonings fell on the same day.

One of the pious observances of the Middle ages that marked the closing of Lent and the opening of Easter time was the blessing of the foods which had been denied so long. Many were the tales of the eager ones who were struck down for eating of them before they had been blessed.

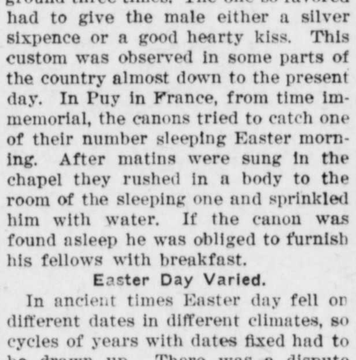
The Easter season has always been accepted as the time for receiving the young into the church. What a picture it makes!

HOPE SUPREME

I think of the garden after the rain;
And hope to my heart comes singing.
At morn the cherry blooms will be white,
And the Easter bells be ringing.

—Edna Dean Proctor.

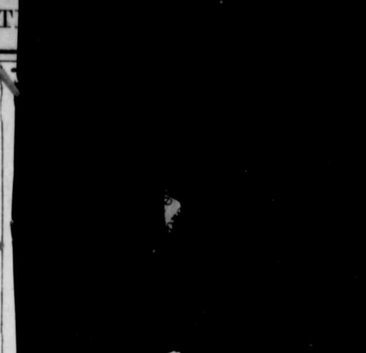
Named for Mrs. Harding.



"The Mrs. Harding," a beautiful white amaryllis, the white being the first of this species ever to be produced, was shown at the ninth annual amaryllis show at the greenhouses of the Department of Agriculture.

Custom Is Ancient One.

The dyed Easter egg is a thing which goes back deep into pre-Christion times as a custom of the people of northern Europe, and it may be that they got the habit from older peoples. A writer has set it forth that "from the festival of Easter as observed among the Norsemen arose the symbols of the Easter egg and the Easter rabbit as prolific reproducers of species, and the color of the Easter eggs—red, blue, yellow, etc.—was borrowed from the rays of the Aurora Borealis—northern lights—and the dawning hues of the Easter sun."



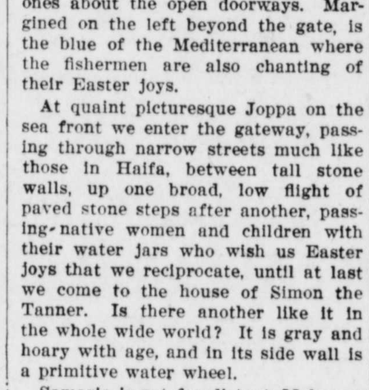
Via Dolorosa, Along Which Christ Traveled on the Road to Calvary.

Easter carols, always singing, "Christ Is Risen!" even before the day itself. And everywhere they are coloring eggs, arranging bouquets of flowers in the windows, and hanging festoons of vines and wreaths of scarlet anemones about the open doorways. Margined on the left beyond the gate, is the blue of the Mediterranean where the fishermen are also chanting of their Easter joys.

At quaint picturesque Joppa on the sea front we enter the gateway, passing through narrow streets much like those in Haifa, between tall stone walls, up one broad, low flight of paved stone steps after another, passing native women and children with their water jars who wish us Easter joys that we reciprocate, until at last we come to the house of Simon the Tanner. Is there another like it in the whole wide world? It is gray and hoary with age, and in its side wall is a primitive water wheel.

Samaria is not far distant, Mahomet intimates, and we wonder if we are dreaming when we actually see the Woman of Samaria at the well, just as she is pictured in the Bible. Bethel, too, is but a stone's throw away and we spend a couple of hours there resting under the fig trees watching the children plait the wild geranium wreaths they will wear round their heads and necks when they go to church Easter morning.

We spend that night in the home of our Zionist host in Jerusalem, but early on the morrow again fare forth to Jericho and the Dead sea, crossing the towering slopes of Olivet, and again passing through peaceful little Bethany, where pilgrims are already setting forth for the city to sell their



Entrance to the Church of the Assumption, Jerusalem.

wreaths, eggs and sweet-cakes to worshipers at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

At Bethlehem we visit the Church of the Nativity with its splendid columns from the Temple of Solomon, where Christ taught the Wise Men. It is under military protection, yet filled and overflowing with natives worshiping on or near the spot, marked by a marble slab and a silver star, where once stood the manger in which Jesus was born. At Rachel's tomb we find military guardians also, as there will be, of course, until the question is settled as to Palestine's future. We buy a wreath from a native child and place it on the tomb, already heaped with offerings.

First comes the Washing of the Feet, a survival of a miracle play, which we witness with a multitude of pilgrims from the high windows and roof of the Greek convent. The chief event of the week, however, is the Holy fire for which we take our places early in the morning, for the doors are sealed at twelve o'clock. Spectators

Ford

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F. O. B. DETROIT

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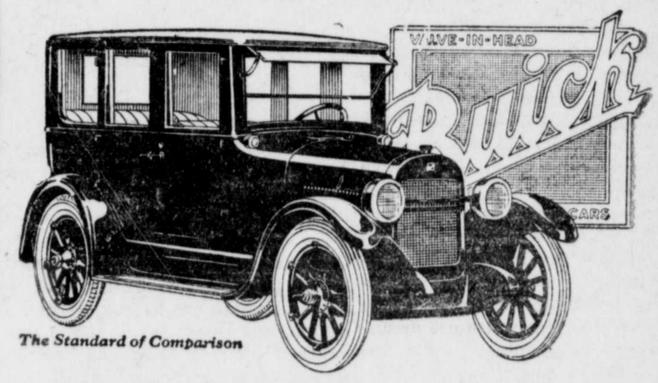
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